

The Kathmandu Post/www.ekantipur.com, Wednesday, March 25, 2009

Efforts of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to support youths in Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts through its Youth Initiatives for Peace and Reconciliation project has reached over 32,000 youths.

Working at the grass-roots level, this project empowered youths to play a more constructive role in their communities, according to the USAID.

The project enabled creation of village youth committees; engaged youth in small-scale community service projects, including planting trees, improving roads and assisting in dispute resolution; provided training in conflict management, leadership and social mobilisation; and facilitated events that created opportunities for interaction and collaboration between youth from different geographic areas and ethnicities. The project also received support from the NIKE Foundation in the form of sports materials.

"Youth clubs in Nepal are part of an effort the USAID began in 2006 to engage young people between 16 and 30 years old in activities that promote peace and reconciliation," said Beth S. Paige, Mission Director of USAID/Nepal.

"The groups organise activities that offer creative alternatives to conflict, develop new skills and promote self-confidence, which is considered a priority after 12 years of conflict in Nepal that disproportionately affected the country's youth."

"In several of the community service projects, youth's contributions far outweighed the contribution of the project itself, which is a testament to the ability of youth clubs to leverage participation and resources from community members," she added.

Krishna Kusumyah, a project participant from Dang district, said, "We have two communities in our village - Tharus and Brahmin/ Chhetris. These two communities always quarreled in the

past. When we formed a youth club and invited members of the other ethnic group to come, no one came at first; but we continued to invite them and one or two youth started to come. Then, we planned to gravel and maintain the road as part of a community service project."

"This project really brought youth from the two communities together. Now we speak and say hello when we meet on the road. Visits between youth in each other's communities are increasing and we are becoming friends."

The two-year \$600,000 project was funded by the USAID and implemented by the Mercy Corps and Backward Society Education (BASE) beginning September 2006.